

June 10, 2008

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
Building II, Suite 204  
13540 East Boundary Road  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I want to express to your organization my sincere appreciation for the hands-on legal experience your organization afforded me this semester. I gained skills that I know will serve me well in my career as a public interest lawyer. More importantly, I learned that working closely with clients is extremely fulfilling.

My experience at Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto (CLS) was especially enjoyable because I felt like I was changing our clients' lives for the better every day. I had the opportunity to help hard-working families solve their immigration issues and strive for a better life in the United States.

I primarily handled U visa cases, which are granted to immigrants who have been victims of certain qualifying crimes. Successful applicants must also prove they assisted in the crime's investigation or prosecution and that they suffered substantial physical and/or mental abuse as a result of the crime. U visas can provide the path to permanent residency and eventually citizenship that many of CLS's clients lack. Most U visa qualifying immigrants are women who have been the victims of domestic violence, but one of my most memorable clients this semester was actually male.

Our client arrived in the U.S. from El Salvador in 2005 to work as a laborer and send money back to his family who was struggling to survive. The lack of jobs in his country left him no choice but to leave his wife and six children behind in hopes of being able to provide a better life for them from afar. He worked for two years in different parts of the country and sent almost all of his earnings back to his family. But one day last August everything changed. He was assaulted and mugged during a trip to the local corner market. He sustained injuries, including a head wound, which required hospitalization. Because he was uninsured, he left the hospital saddled with debt from his medical treatment. Sadly, the attack left his back in such poor shape that he could no longer work to repay them. He borrowed money from friends for rent and food, but his injuries prevented him from sending money home to his family, a reality which depressed him and made him feel like a failure. Fortunately, our client called the police after the attack and they located the perpetrator. The assailant was later tried and convicted of felonious assault. Our client assisted the authorities in preparing their case and he testified in court against his attacker. Fortunately for him, a friend recommended he go to CLS to seek advice about his immigration situation. After a student volunteer interviewed him and

the attorneys determined he may qualify for a U visa, I worked closely with him to gather evidence and prepare his application. We met frequently and corresponded over the phone about his case. He was very nervous because so much was at stake for him and he wanted to make sure his family could join him in the U.S. as soon as possible. Our communication took place in Spanish, which is my second language. Through my conversations with him and other clients, my speaking ability grew tremendously throughout the semester. He particularly boosted my confidence by always telling me how appreciative he was that I could speak to him in his native language.

The day we filed the petition for him and his family was quite meaningful to me. It was the first U visa I completed. I will probably always remember the feeling of holding the towering stack of bound paper in my hands, conscious as I dropped it in the manila mailing envelope that it represented the futures of our client, his wife, and his six children. I could not have felt more fulfilled.

My fellowship experience taught me a tremendous amount about client interaction and communication. It increased my substantive knowledge of immigration law and expanded the repertoire of visas I am able to handle. All of these skills are important, but I was most impacted by our clients and their stories. Many of them were heart-breaking and I was constantly reminded of the critical need for our services. I thank Equal Justice America for supporting the work of Community Legal Services and other like organizations that are endeavoring daily to bring justice to low-income communities. I certainly felt I was able to contribute to this crucial work through the fellowship program and I will be forever grateful for the opportunity.

Sincerely,

Katrina Eiland  
Stanford Law School  
Class of 2010